Social Media and Future of Leadership: Call for Action in the Balkans

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Abstract. In the new century, social media and user generated content are profoundly transforming not only communications in general but also business, political campaigns and higher education. This paper is a summary statement coming out of the "Social Media and Future of Leadership" Conference held in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12–13 May, 2011. Based on recent experiences, social media in higher education can help to overcome local challenges and respond to global opportunities. Social media in political campaigns can contribute to social mobilization of large groups, to combat the political apathy of youth and to increase transparency. Business applications of social media have been successfully used for sales, marketing, public relations and internal communications. The new media can promote more inclusive social interaction that respects minorities and minority views. However, Balkan countries need to make fundamental progress to increase access to the Internet and fully understand the logic, professional opportunities and democratic character of this new tool of communication. In order to compete effectively in the globalizing knowledge society, Balkan nations have to recognize the benefits of social media in education, business and politics.

Keywords: social media, higher education, research, political campaign, business

Introduction

In the 21st century it is a fundamental reality that we live in a rapidly changing world where the digital information dominates every aspect of our lives. This changing world is increasingly interconnected and there is a rapid flow of information and experiences on a daily basis. Those who do not participate in this digital world will find it difficult to succeed.

The Internet makes possible even in the most remote locations to communicate and succeed on a region-wide, national or international level. The new communication technologies are tools for modernization and competitiveness, they offer societies new methods of communication and social dialogue, enhancement of democracy and even reduction of social and geographic discrimination.

Over the last few years the Internet, and recently the social media, have had a profound effect on the private and professional lives of citizens, on an economical, political, social and academic level. They offer a wide range of new possibilities for accessing information, exchanging ideas, gaining new knowledge, making business and learning goals. Social media tools provide fast, efficient and low-cost ways to access any kind of information and knowledge. They are highly accessible, scalable, interactive and web-based technologies that support social interactions. In business terms, it is consumer generated media that creates value (like YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogger, Wikis, Skype, Amazon, Flickr, Twitter etc.).

The present paper is a follow-up study of the *"Social Media and Future of Leadership" Conference* held in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12–13 May, 2011. The conference project flowed from the premise that Internet and social media technologies are radically transforming the character of leadership all over the world. In the era of globalization and digital technologies traditional leadership is no longer valid. Today leadership requires a new approach, new mind-set, and new skills. One of the most important characteristics required for today's leaders is connectivity.

The aim of the conference was to bring together academic and business leaders of the Balkan countries for the study of digital social networking and for advancing public participation, educational progress, small nation and minority success, regional economic development and globally inclusive, well-connected leadership. It is of utmost importance to strengthen the ability of leaders to be effective, competitive and connected not only locally but globally as well, in order to be competitive in a digitalized global economy.

The conference was sponsored by the University of Tuzla and the Forerunner Federation USA. Participants were from the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and the United States.

Emerging professional use of Social Media

Since its creation in the early 1960s, from commercialization to private use in the 1980s and its expansion to popular usage in the 1990s, the Internet has become a global network with a huge impact on people, culture and the economy (Varga, 2010). Connecting between people started in the 1970s, with emails and discussion groups, and the possibilities for interaction are improving along with the development of new Internet applications like on-line real-time games (1978), chat (1988) and blog (1993), sites that provide a range of services (Yahoo!, GeoCities, Ebay) and social networking sites (Varga, 2010: 112). According to the World Internet Users and Population Statistics the number of Internet users worldwide reached two billion. This means that between 15 and 20 percent of the world's population is on the Internet.

The development of Internet technologies has led to the transformation of Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. It is argued that a basic similarity of social media Web sites is the user-generated element characterized by openness and collaboration (Smith, 2011). As opposed to Web 1.0, Web 2.0 is considered an ideal platform and context for social networking enabled by different social media. Features of Web 2.0 are enabling remarkable opportunities regarding access to information, data sharing, communication and collaboration in comparison with what was possible a decade ago (Varga, 2010). In addition, social media encourage an active and interactive Internet usage. It provides users with online networks and communities for multi-directional communication and knowledge exchange and allows them to publish and share digital contents (Redecker, Ala-Mutka and Punie, 2010).

There is no doubt that social media and social networking websites have bloated rapidly over the past few years. According to recent statistics, Facebook has grown exponentially since 2006, and now more than 51% of all Americans have a Facebook page (WebMediaBrands). Twitter, once a small micro-blogging website, now has around 200 million members worldwide.

The potential of these interactive social media tools and technologies exceeded the mere entertainment function and are becoming essential ingredients of educational programs, research projects, business ventures and successful political campaigns.

Social media applications in higher education and research have expanded the possibilities for modernizing the educational institutions, innovating the teaching processes and preparing a competitive and effective young workforce. According to Redecker and his colleagues (2010), social media can lead to innovation in education in five different dimensions: (1) facilitates access by students learning content and information, making institutional processes more transparent; (2) integrates learning into a wider community; (3) supports the exchange of knowledge and collaboration among learners and teachers; (4) increases academic achievement; (5) implements

pedagogical strategies to support and improve learning processes. These technologies give students an unprecedented ability to create their own information-rich environments, available everywhere all the time and linked by friendships and community affiliations.

The social media usage is increasingly spreading not only among students but among teachers and professors as well. A survey conducted among 1000 college professors in the United States shows that four out of five professors use social media (Tinti-Kane, Seaman and Levy, 2010). A little more than half use podcasts, video, wikis, and blogs for their classes. About 30% use social networks to communicate with their students, and almost 25% of the professors had four or more accounts on social networks. However, the study shows that just 10 to 12 percent of the professors ask students to use social media tools to create something or post comments. It was also revealed that the most widely used social media service is Facebook.

Being an extremely effective tool for interactions, social media sites attract millions of people to sign up, which is changing the functions of these sites in higher education. Barnes and Mattson (2010) found that at least one form of social media is used for recruiting prospective students by 95% of colleges and universities. Furthermore, benchmarked with the Fortune 500 companies, 51% of colleges and universities admissions offices have a blog for their school, while only 22% of companies have a corporate blog. In addition, online videos are also used by universities to provide virtual tours of their institutions, campuses and sample lectures from faculty members.

The social media usage in higher education institutions in the Balkans is somewhat different due to the specific context and global challenges they face. The Bologna Process and the Europeanization of higher education is undoubtedly one of the most challenging global processes, while local challenges reveal through the economic instability, political disorder and loss of values and norms caused by the conflicts in the 1990s.

In addition to these challenges, higher education institutions have to reckon with fragmentation, international isolation and massive brain drain. It is argued that fragmentation is a main source of problems not only for education institutions, but for governance, management and administration as well. This inheritance from the past leaves its mark on academic teaching, learning and research processes (Cuckovic, 2006). In most of the institutions the amount of student scientific research in the first and second cycle of higher education is still very low. It is part of the thesis work in some cases, but it is not included in curricula.

There is an urgent need to adapt to these challenges and face successfully the changes caused by the market forces, technological development and new knowledge providers. It has to be realized that without bringing profound and lasting changes in institutional level, in governance and management structures of

higher education, every kind of renewal in the teaching, learning and research process as well as the students' assessments will have less chance to be achieved successfully.

The main challenge higher education leaders face is the sustainable development in education, research and innovation. An evaluation of the universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina made in 2004 shows that most of the universities do not have professionally trained administrators who are capable of providing essential functions a modern university needs (EUA, 2004). The universities need to realize how great responsibility they have in their own development, they need to be less dependent on the state and more innovative regarding the overall performance. For this reason, to keep a competitive academic leadership has an utmost importance. We can witness that the traditional leadership approach is no longer valid, a new entrepreneurial style has to be set. This means on the one hand new directions and orientations in visioning, planning and managing, on the other hand requires connectivity, networking and relationship building.

The crucial role of science in higher education has to be also recognized. On the one hand, science education is the key to the success in the globally competitive world, on the other hand students must be prepared for this challenge. More and more jobs require educated workforce, who can respond flexibly to complex problems, communicate effectively, manage information, work in teams, and produce innovative results.

The active usage of social media in higher education can contribute to cope effectively with the global and local challenges mentioned above and to sustain a recognized and competitive higher education system in the Balkan countries. The increasing number of studies and best practices suggest that social media has efficiently worked its way into higher education.

Political campaigns are also affected by social media. During the 2008 elections in the United States it was observed that Barack Obama had a large social media presence. As an article in New York Times wrote: "*were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president*" (11/7/2008). Obama's presidential campaign changed the way Internet is used for political purposes, specifically social media in political campaigns. He focused on social media to connect with voters and supporters, to mobilize millions of volunteers, to reach young voters and receive donations. The major social networks used in the campaign were Facebook and YouTube. During the election period Obama had 2 million Facebook friends (currently has more than 20 million), while John McCain had only 600,000. In addition, Obama supporters uploaded 1,800 videos, while around 300 videos were loaded to McCain's YouTube channel. Today most of the political parties create websites and use social media tools, because since the Obama campaign it is hard to refuse the most efficient way of circulating information.

Social media platforms can be used efficiently by local politicians as well. Local campaigns usually have smaller budgets and staffs than large campaigns, so they can easily manage a successful low budget campaign using well-developed social media strategies.

It is agreed that social media has an important impact on the political apathy associated with the younger generations. The Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that many young adults do not actively search for political information but rather encounter such information while going online for other purposes (Smith 2011). In this way, social media provides the opportunity to reach younger candidates and encourage them to participate and become partners in political discussions.

However, social media is a relatively new way for politicians to communicate, so problems and challenges have arisen as well. One of the problems that Twitter can cause is related to its speed. A March 28, 2011 USA TODAY article argues that "*it now only takes 140 characters to damage a political campaign*" (Kucinich, 2011). A January New York Times article discusses the problems political bloggers can present for candidates using social media tools (Jeremy, 2011). For example if a rumor is spread, it may be reprinted in papers and discussed on cable television as if it were a fact. So this immediate nature of social media sites can make them harmful and destructive.

Regarding grassroots socio-political organizations, social media has an enormous impact. One of the recent examples is the revolution that waved throughout the Middle East. Social media sites, mainly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, were used to show to the world what was happening. In addition, people used these sites to increase government transparency and to build an international network equipped with information.

Concerning the future usage of social media, new trends and methods are already emerging. Future political campaigns seem to be affected by the increased use of social media platforms on smartphones and other mobile tablets. A new method thought to be effective in the future is to target specific groups and small online niches with messages personalized to their particular interests instead of sending out general messages to everyone. In the March 2011 article in *Campaigns and Elections* Greyes said that sending out impersonal, general messages via traditional political communications like mailings, phone calls, newspaper editorials, television ads and emails is waste of time and money (Smith, 2011).

The social media usage in political campaigns in the Balkan countries shows a merely different sight. According to a very limited number of research, while many national parties, organizations, politicians and other public persons use Internet sites as an obligatory supplement to their promotional campaign, Bosnia and Herzegovina still oscillates between "tradition" and the Internet (Vоćkić–Avdagić, 2003). Most of the politicians do not have presence on social media sites and

generally use the one-way style of communication without understanding the logic and the democratic character of these new ways of communication (*ibidem*).

In conclusion it can be said that no matter how politicians use social media in their campaigns, social media technologies will continue to be an important part of the campaign process. Social media tools represent a very cost-effective and immediately accessible forum and appear to create a new community of equal people.

The business applications of social media are widespread as marketing and public relations tools. The Center for Marketing Research (Barnes, 2011) indicates that 91% of companies incorporated at least one social media service or tool in 2009. In 2007, 43 percent of the companies did not use social media, which dropped to 9 percent in 2009. Social media users in business areas agree that the overall marketing costs dropped when they implemented the social media marketing.

According to statistical studies, in the United States, four services dominate the use of social media networks and tools: Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn. The Facebook users are likely to be married (40%) with the second-highest average income ($61,000) and an average of 121 connections. Twitter users are entrepreneurial, they use the service to promote their businesses. MySpace users are more likely to be single (60%), student (23%) interested in having fun, specifically in the areas of entertaining friends, humor and comedy, and video games. The LinkedIn users are likely male (its ratio of male to female users is 57% to 43%) who tend to like news, employment information, sports, and politics (Anderson, Reaves and Makovic, 2010).

The research also shows that the social networkers' feelings about online brands in general are more positive than the researchers thought they would be. Some 52% of social networkers had friended or become a fan of at least one brand (Anderson *et al.,* 2010).

Regarding the business application of social media, there are generally four functions that social networks are used for: sales, marketing, public relations and internal communications. As the Social Media Marketing Industry Report (2011) shows, the marketing side takes a lot of time. The majority of marketers (58%) are using social media for 6 hours or more each week, and more than a third (34%) invest 11 or more hours weekly. The YouTube and video marketing is in increase. The top social media tools used in the four functions mentioned above are the Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina a very good example of social media usage in business is the Islamic Arts Magazine founded by Kenan Surkovic and Elvira Bojadzic in Sarajevo. The aim of the international e-magazine is to promote the traditional and contemporary Islamic Art and artists from the Islamic world. Via social media they reached 20,000 people so far.

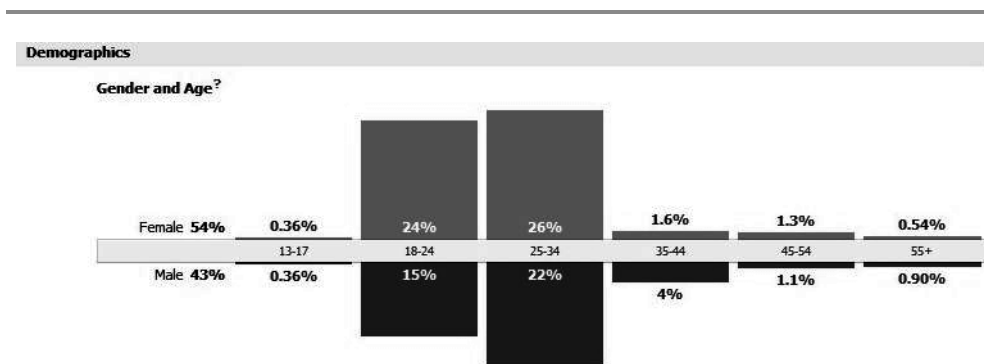## Limited use of Social Media in the Balkans

The Balkan countries have largely been outside of the intensive information society building process of European profile. However, the critical importance of information and communication technologies for improving competitiveness, creativity and innovation was acknowledged by the European Commission. Underdevelopment of the past, existential problems of the present and the uncertainty of the future created a mix of unfavorable circumstances for new ICTs' adoption. This is why internet penetration in Balkan countries is low compared with those published as average of Europe (Kostov, 2006).

The statistical data show that Balkan and other European countries are digitally deeply divided (Kostov 2006). It is alarming that according to Internet World Statistics, in 2008 31.2% of the population in Bosnia-Herzegovina had access to the Internet, which places the country on the 48th grade (out of 53) in the Internet Usage in Europe ranking. But the Internet penetration level in Bosnia is one of the highest in the Balkan region. The growth for the decade made up almost 20.500%. Despite this fact in many Balkan countries there is low internet literacy in terms of both internet access and level of sophistication among internet users.

Division regarding the internet usage in the Balkan countries exists between urban-rural regions and in a lower degree between genders. In statistical data, it does not appear that there is a huge gender gap in Internet usage, with a light exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, most likely due to cultural specificities. However, it appears that urban-rural divisions concerning Internet usage are sharp. Particularly in Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina it is disappointing that 99% of the Internet users live in urban areas (Kostov, 2006).

The Internet users in Bosnia and Herzegovina are mainly the young, 27 year old people with a 1:2 women/men ratio. The percentage of women using the Internet is between 10% and 30% (rarely over 30%), the average percentage being 14% (Voćkić–Avdagić, 2003).

In *The Social Media and Future of Leadership* conference Šejn Husejnefendić and Mirza Mehmedović from the University of Tuzla presented the social media and marketing applications in Southeastern Bosnia region. They used a sample of 100 Internet users and found that the most popular social media is Facebook (94%) and YouTube (86%). Although to a lower degree, but the respondents use Google Buzz (13%), Tagged (12%), MySpace (9%) and Twitter (5%). Half of the respondents use social media daily, 32 percent almost every day and only 10 percent uses it twice a week. Social media users are mainly students and 18–25 years old youths.

Demographics

Gender and Age?

|		13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Female	54%	0.36%	24%	26%	1.6%	1.3%	0.54%
Male	43%	0.36%	15%	22%	4%	1.1%	0.90%

Graph 1. The characteristics of online media users
(Source: Šejn and Mehmedović, 2011)

Vedada Baraković from the University of Tuzla presented the new forms of media activism, the manifestations of e-revolutions (Tunis, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Croatia). According to the GfK data, 52% of the population in Bosnia-Herzegovina uses at least one social media site. Graph 2. below reveals that the profile of the social media user in Bosnia-Herzegovina is a 15-24 year old female with university degree, living in urban area.

Mahmutović and Jamakosmanović (2011) from the University of Tuzla argue that social media has changed the traditional view of healthcare, helping to remove barriers between doctors and patients. However, social media usage in healthcare systems and communication is not sufficiently developed, and it is related to three factors: (1) deep misunderstanding of social media by healthcare management; (2) underdeveloped communication infrastructure in healthcare institutions; (3) passive patients who are used to the old paternalistic doctor-centric model. The authors argue that healthcare organizations and professionals still use the traditional, vertical communication model which is the main barrier for wider application of social media technologies.
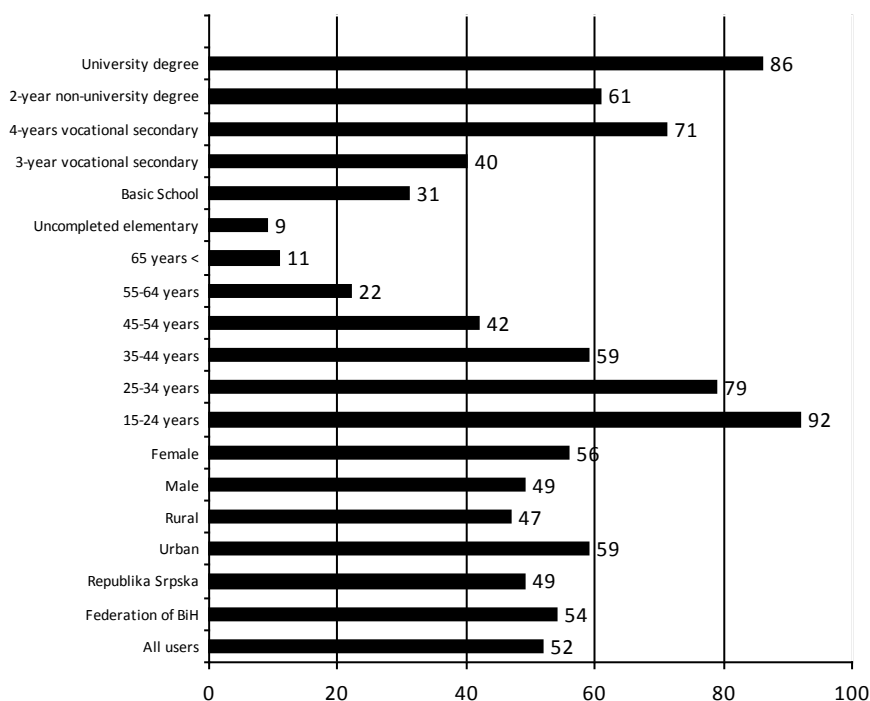
Graph 2. Social media usage in Bosnia-Herzegovina
(Source: Baraković, 2011)

The ten rights and principles of Internet governance compiled by the Internet Rights and Principles Dynamic Coalition (IRP) were presented by Tucaković (2011) from the Riyasat of the Islamic Community. These are:

1. *Universality and Equality* (all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights, which must be respected, protected and fulfilled in the online environment)
2. *Rights and Social Justice* (the Internet is a space for the promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights and the advancement of social justice; everyone has the duty to respect the human rights of all others in the online environment)
3. *Accessibility* (everyone has an equal right to access and use a secure and open Internet)
4. *Expression and Association* (everyone has the right to seek, receive, and impart information freely on the Internet; everyone also has the right to associate freely through and on the Internet)

5. *Privacy and Data Protection* (everyone has the right to privacy online)
6. *Life, Liberty and Security* (the rights to life, liberty, and security must be respected, protected and fulfilled)
7. *Diversity* (cultural and linguistic diversity on the Internet must be promoted)
8. *Network Equality* (everyone shall have universal and open access to the Internet's content, free from discriminatory prioritization, filtering or traffic control on commercial, political or other grounds)
9. *Standards and Regulation* (document and data formats shall be based on open standards that ensure complete interoperability, inclusion and equal opportunity for all)
10. *Governance* (human rights and social justice must form the legal and normative foundations upon which the Internet operates and is governed)

Call for action

Over the last few years the internet has had a profound effect on the private and professional lives all over the world. Social media and networking is changing the way we communicate and interact like never before. It also offers an increasing number and range of opportunities in political, business and academic sectors.

The importance of social media has to be recognized by the leaders of the Balkan countries as well. In order to prosper and keep up in the rapidly changing information society, to build a viable, respected and competitive Balkan community, policy makers, academic, business and political leaders must join together to take action.

To preserve and strengthen the great values of social media, our educational institutions, business enterprises and public institutions should take the following actions:

1. To greatly increase internet access and promote the use, particularly professional use of social media.
2. Educational and business leaders at all levels need to embrace effective use of social media in order to compete effectively in the globalizing knowledge society.
3. The Balkans region needs positive affirmative action initiatives to increase appreciation of diverse cultures, minority views, historic traditions and new ideas.
4. Strengthening of media and democracy requires strong and well developed public media sector free from bureaucratization and government involvement.

> 5. The social media should remain free, open access and democratic, not dominated by media tycoons or dictatorial governments.

The scientific research, studies, presentations and articles indicate that social media is changing the world. The function of social media platforms diversify and the social media technologies penetrate into academic, business and non-profit sectors. An increasing number of studies emphasize the economic, social and political impacts of social media technologies. It is also evident that the professional usage of social media is profoundly different among Balkan countries and the USA or Western Europe. For this reason Balkan countries need to make special efforts to promote, adapt and exploit the benefits of social media in academic and business sectors as well.

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